

MINISTER GENERAL'S
CHRISTMAS GREETINGS 2022

The people
who walked in darkness
have seen a great light ¹

Rome, 8 December 2022

To all the Friars Minor of the Order
To the Contemplative Sisters of our Family
To the brothers, sisters, and friends of our Order

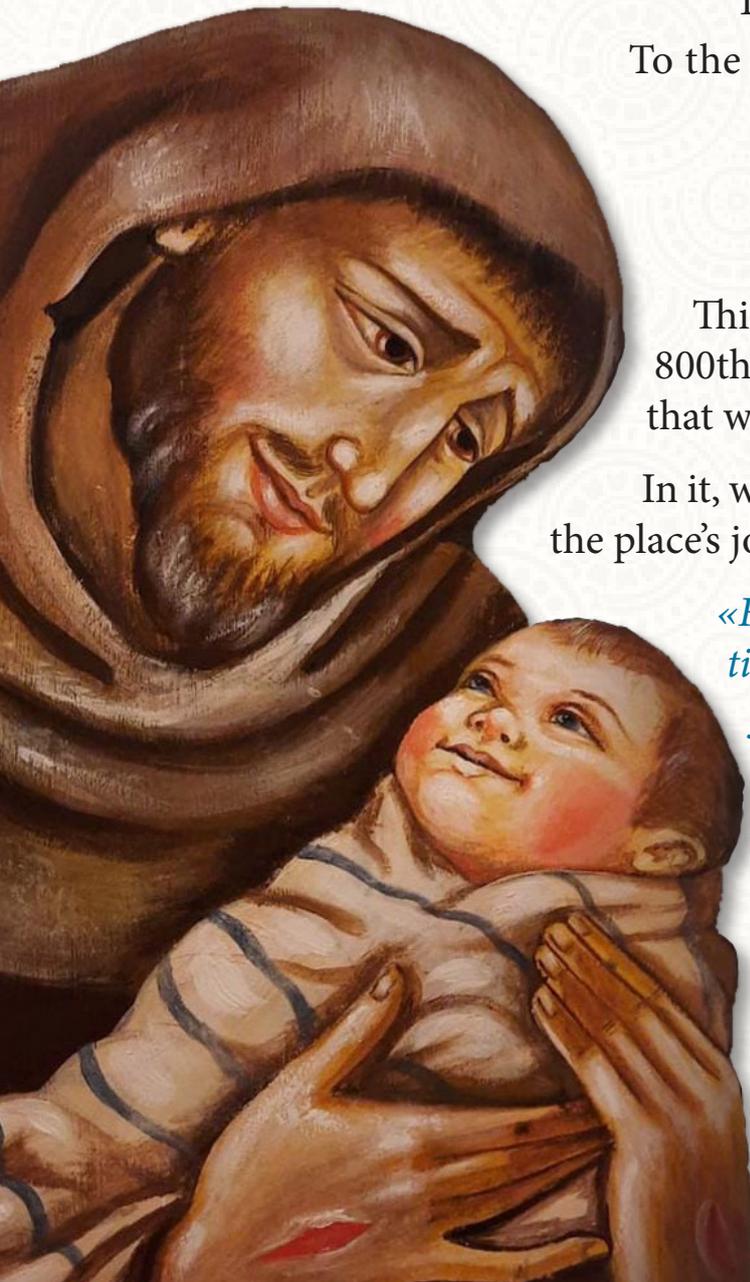
Dear Brothers and Sisters,
May the Lord give you peace!

This Christmas we already look forward to the 800th anniversary of the Christmas of Greccio that we will celebrate in 2023.

In it, we recognise signs of light and darkness amid the place's joy, night, and poverty.

«Finally, the day of joy has drawn near, the time of exultation has come. From many different places, the brethren have been called. As they could, the men and women of that land, with exultant hearts, prepare candles and torches to light up that night whose shining star has enlightened every day and year. Finally, the holy man of God comes and, finding all things prepared, he saw them and was glad. Indeed, the manger is

¹ Is 9:2.



prepared, the hay is carried in, the ox and the ass are led to the spot. There simplicity is given a place of honour, poverty is exalted, humility is commended, and out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem»².

The light of Christmas, and the Greccio Centenary, come at a dark time. Peace is threatened, in Ukraine and the rest of the world, where there are so many conflicts, from the Middle East to many African countries, from the Caribbean to Central and South America, and from Asia to Oceania. So many of our brothers and sisters live within these borders of war and remain among and with the people, especially the poor.

Today, more than ever, we make Jeremiah's cry our own:

«We look for peace but find no good; for a time of healing, but there is terror instead»³

It is the cry of so much humanity, and we make it our own by addressing it to God: it shakes us out of our sluggishness and distraction, and it provokes us to new action and thought.

With this cry, we prepare for Christmas with Francis: *«For I wish to enact the memory of that babe who was born in Bethlehem: to see as much as is possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay»⁴.*

With our gaze on both the light and the darkness of the night of Greccio and Bethlehem, we can join with the cry of so many who invoke peace and hope. It is not an anaesthetic, but the way to read the signs of the times and recognise in the darkness of this dramatic hour the signs of a life that is the light of humankind, a light that shines in the darkness, even if this darkness does not welcome it⁵.

The Greccio Christmas Centenary is an opportunity to proclaim the light of the Gospel in these dark times. How? In the context of the Incarnation to say God, we must love the earth. God looks with love at the world in crisis, and for this reason, he gives his Son and, in faith, allows us to recognise in today's world more open doors than barred ones, more opportunities than signs of death.

I propose some lights and opportunities that I can discern in our world today.

The crisis of this dark time is an opportunity **for a new encounter with the One who became poor for us**. It is so for each of us and also for our fraternities, which need a profound and urgent reform if they are to have a liveable and credible future in our time.

2 1Cel 85.

3 Jer 14:19.

4 1Cel 84.

5 cf. Jn 1:4-5.

The crisis of this dark time is an opportunity to **reaffirm faith and charism today** with more essential words and actions that show it through new relationships. Francis goes up to Greccio with the brothers, the peasants and the poor, and the lord of the place, without barriers.

The crisis of this dark time is an opportunity **to listen to the Gospel of peace as the criterion for rethinking faith in Jesus Christ as memory and prophecy**, to interpret our charism as brothers and sisters, contemplative, minor, meek, and peaceful in a new, dynamic, and creative way.

The crisis of this dark time is an opportunity to **cultivate dialogue**: the war in Ukraine shows the disturbing and painful opposition between Christian Churches. It is a provocation that unmasks the manipulations that power makes of religions, which cannot be “instruments of the kingdom”.

The crisis of this dark time is an opportunity to cultivate the **theory and practice of non-violence**, which has deep evangelical and Franciscan roots, all of which need to be deepened, even among us.

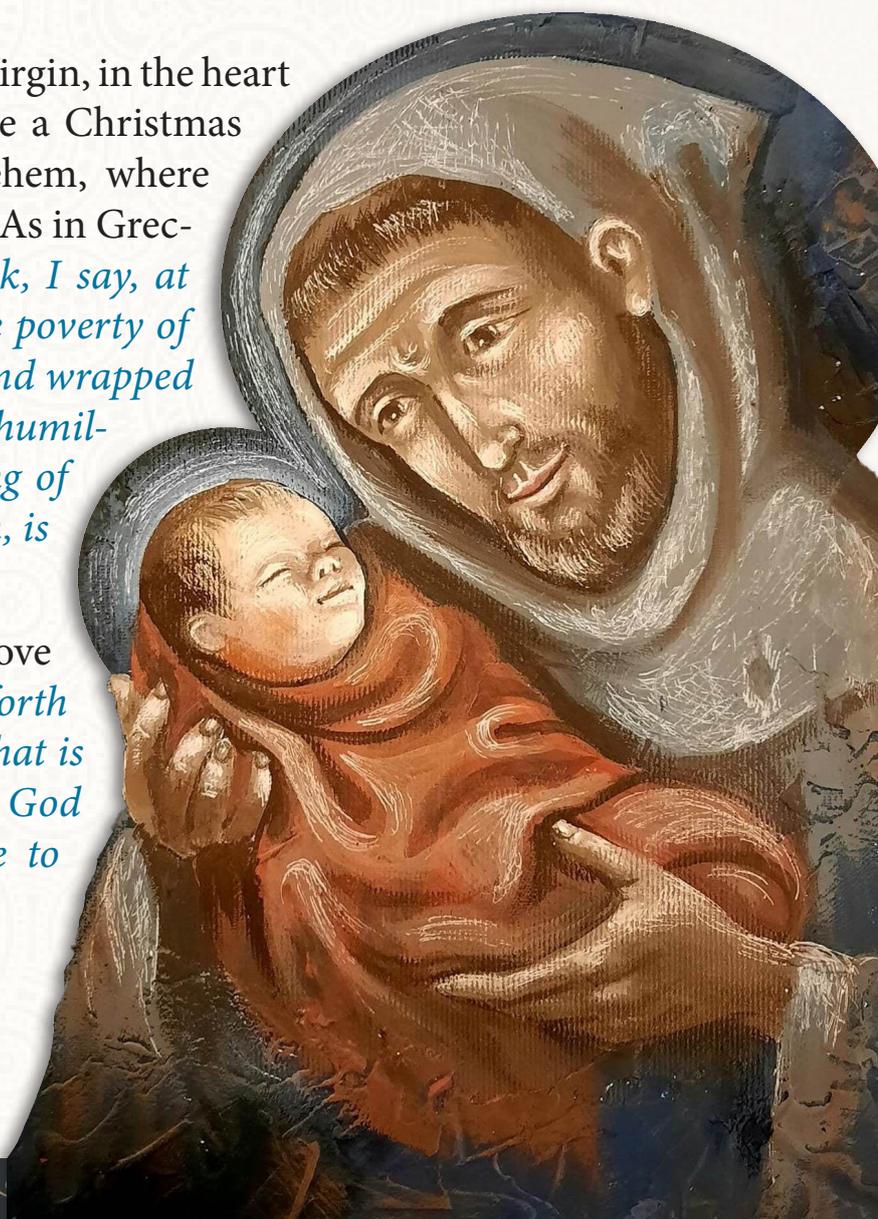
Dear brothers and sisters!

With the feast of the Immaculate Virgin, in the heart of Advent, we prepare to experience a Christmas both bright and dark, as in Bethlehem, where the Child who is born is threatened. As in Greccio, where Clare invites us to *«Look, I say, at the border of this mirror, that is, the poverty of Him Who was placed in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. O, marvellous humility! O astonishing poverty! The King of angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, is laid in a manger»*⁶.

Let us welcome this gift from above because *«For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations»*⁷.

6 4 Ag, 19-21.

7 Is 61:11.



We are witnesses that peace is a gift rather than our work, and therefore we co-operate with the Lord for the blossoming of the fullness of life that He wants to pour out on all.

In this spirit, I offer to each and every one of you my fraternal best wishes for a Holy Christmas and a Happy New Year 2023, the beginning of the Franciscan Centenary. This greeting comes in the different contexts and situations in which we live. May it be a Christmas in which, in prayerful expectation, we can cry out with many:

*«Shower, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.
Let the earth open, that salvation may spring up,
and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also.
I, the Lord, have created it»⁸.*



Your brother and servant

Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, ofm

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